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RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 0235
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0851
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RHMFISS/COMSOEUR VAIHINGEN GE
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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 000593

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TAGS: PREL PGOV MASS EAID PTER MR

SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: PRESIDENT AZIZ ON TERRORISM AND
EXTREMISM

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 569

Classified By: CDA Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) During the Ambassador's August 8 call on President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz on other matters, Aziz spoke about the terrorist and extremist threats facing Mauritania. Aziz focused first on the internal drivers of extremism, telling the Ambassador that disgruntled youth were driven to extremism and, in some cases, to Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) by "poor governance, bad national leadership, corruption, and a weak judiciary" -- all areas he said his government would address.

¶2. (C) Aziz saw the proximity of AQIM bases in northern Mali as a serious threat and one that has the potential of becoming a trans-Saharan threat if not addressed now when it was still manageable. He noted that while AQIM was not a significantly large force now, it will grow "if it keeps getting a few million here, and a few million there, from ransom payments." Seeing that cash inflow as a way for AQIM to both conduct more operations and entice new members, Aziz said, "we need to prevent it from replicating itself." Aziz added, "I know we can't eradicate terrorism, but we are committed to combating it."

¶3. (C) Aziz was confident AQIM could be contained but stressed it needed a regional approach. In that vein, he voiced doubts about Malian commitment to the fight noting Bamako had previously been "at peace" with AQIM to avoid attacks on its territory -- but at the cost of forgoing potential mineral exploration in its northern areas. Aziz indicated he would meet Malian President Toure following Ramadan to get a better feel for Malian commitment (Comment: It was not clear if he meant a bilateral visit or as part of the long-anticipated trans-Saharan security meeting. End Comment).

¶4. (C) Aziz' concerns echoed those of Chief of Defense General Ghazwany who met with the Ambassador, DATT, and AFRICOM visitors on August 1. As reported in greater detail in DAO channels, Ghazwany noted that AQIM in northern Mali is still a force of a few hundred fighters and maybe twenty vehicles. While the vast desert is a tough area to conduct military operations, he noted "it doesn't offer the hiding places of an Afghanistan." Ghazwany welcomed the Algerian initiative for cooperation between Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger. The four armies working together could take on the AQIM threat, he felt. That stated, Ghazwany said he

wanted to see concrete actions coming out of the nice declarations coming out of the Algeria meeting. He too questioned whether Mali was really committed to the fight but said, "since they sent their Chief of Defense to the meeting, I have to assume they are sincere."

HANKINS